



Things Left Unsaid

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Things Left Unsaid



The Gulf War is the first
total electronic war...
current conflict no
longer plays out only
on the line of the front
of a given geographic
horizon, but first of all on
the monitors, the control
screens of televisions of
the entire world.
— Paul Virilio



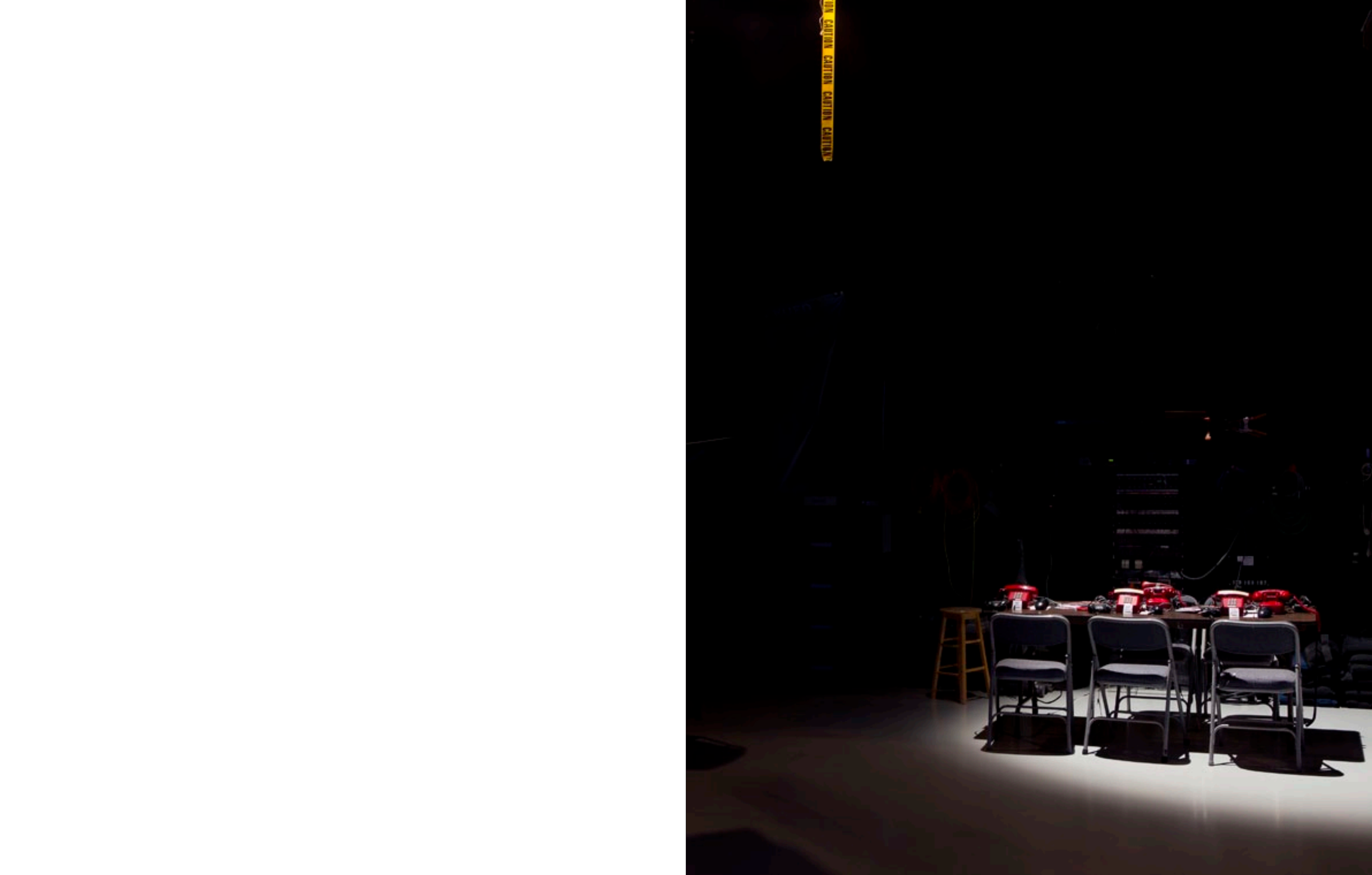
Paul Seawright
Things Left Unsaid

Artist Photo Books

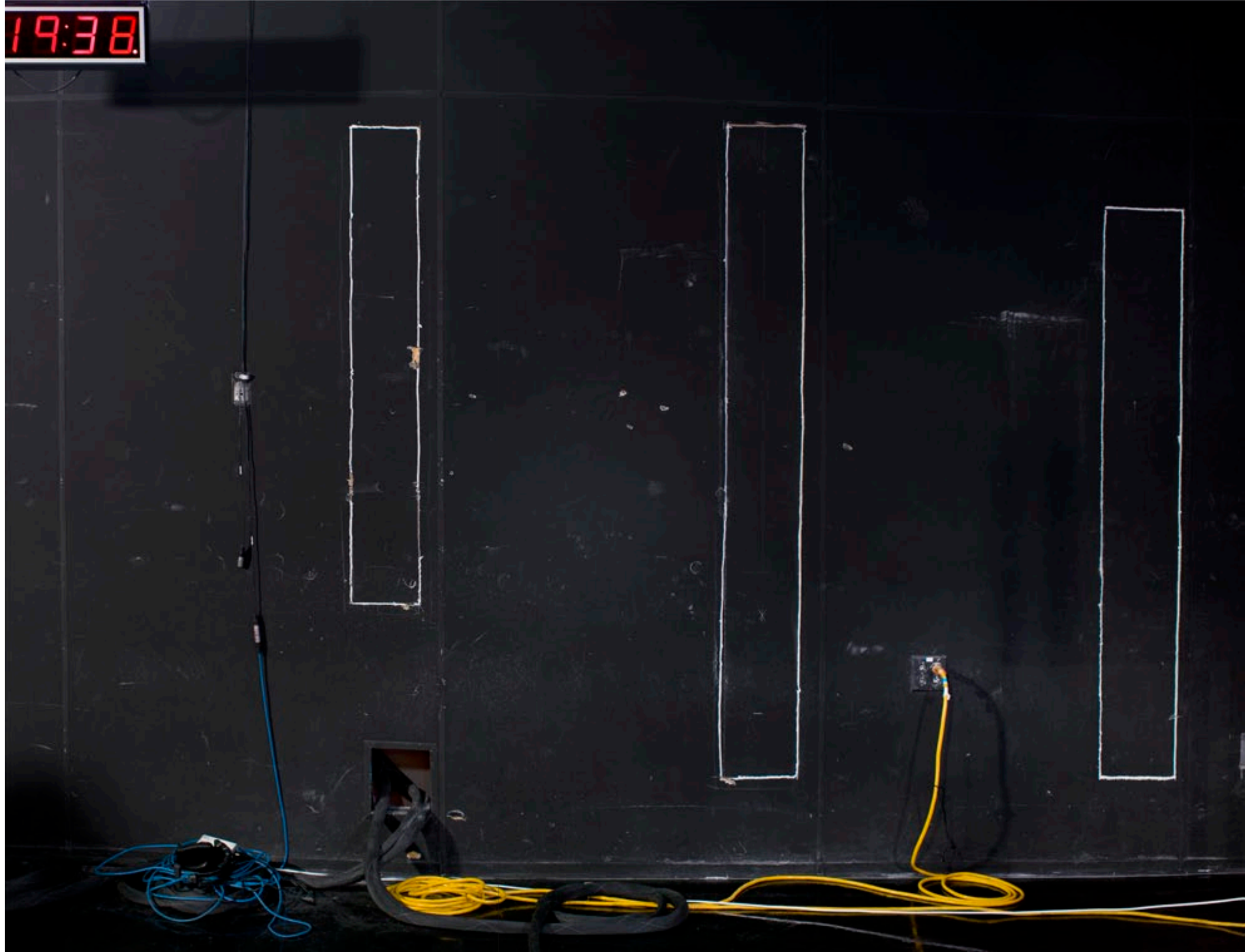








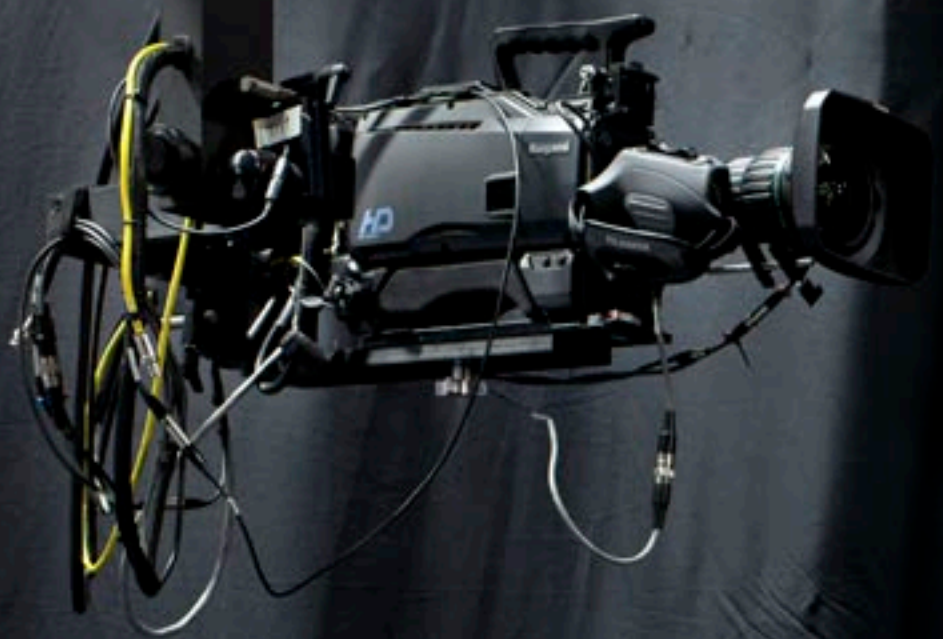
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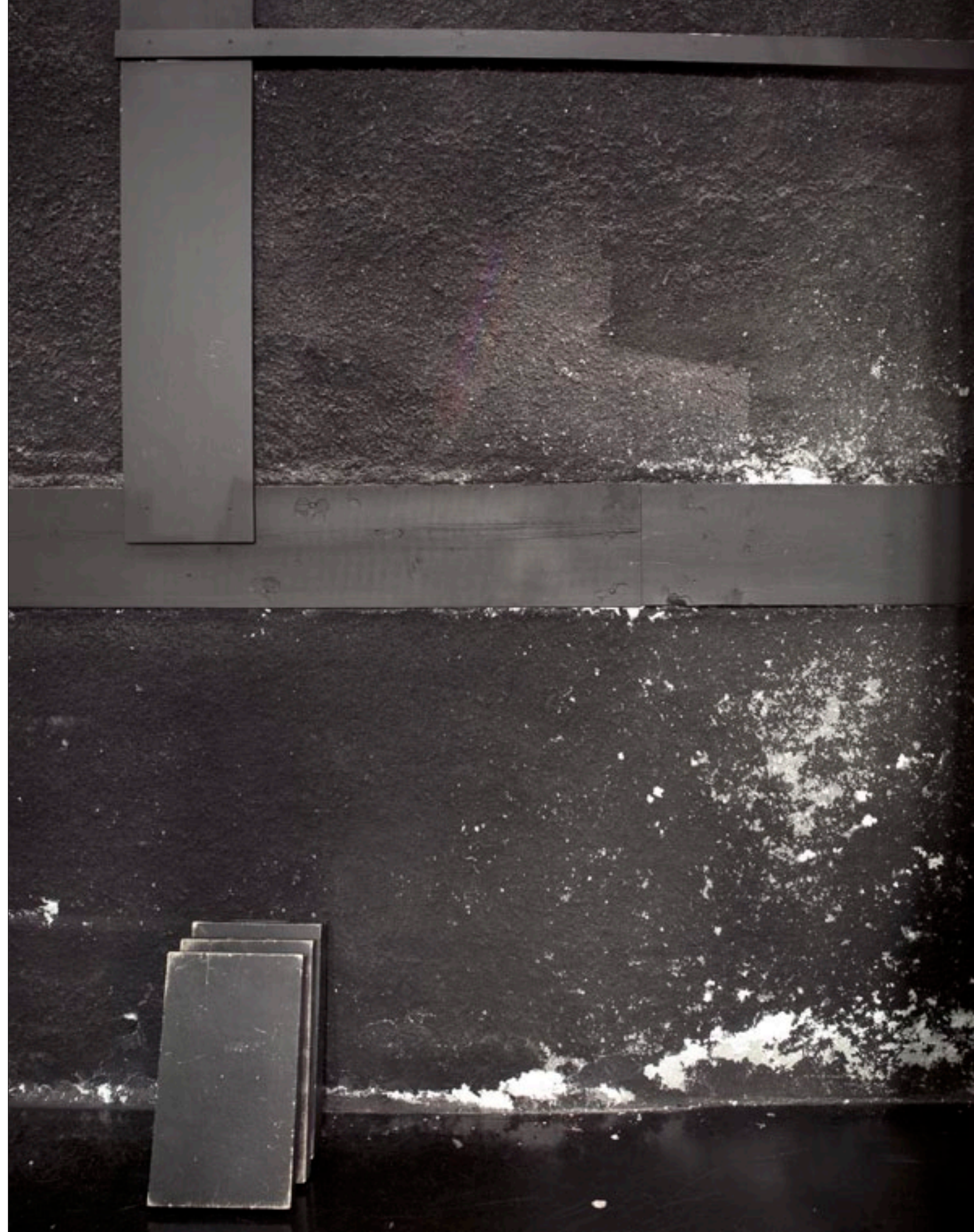
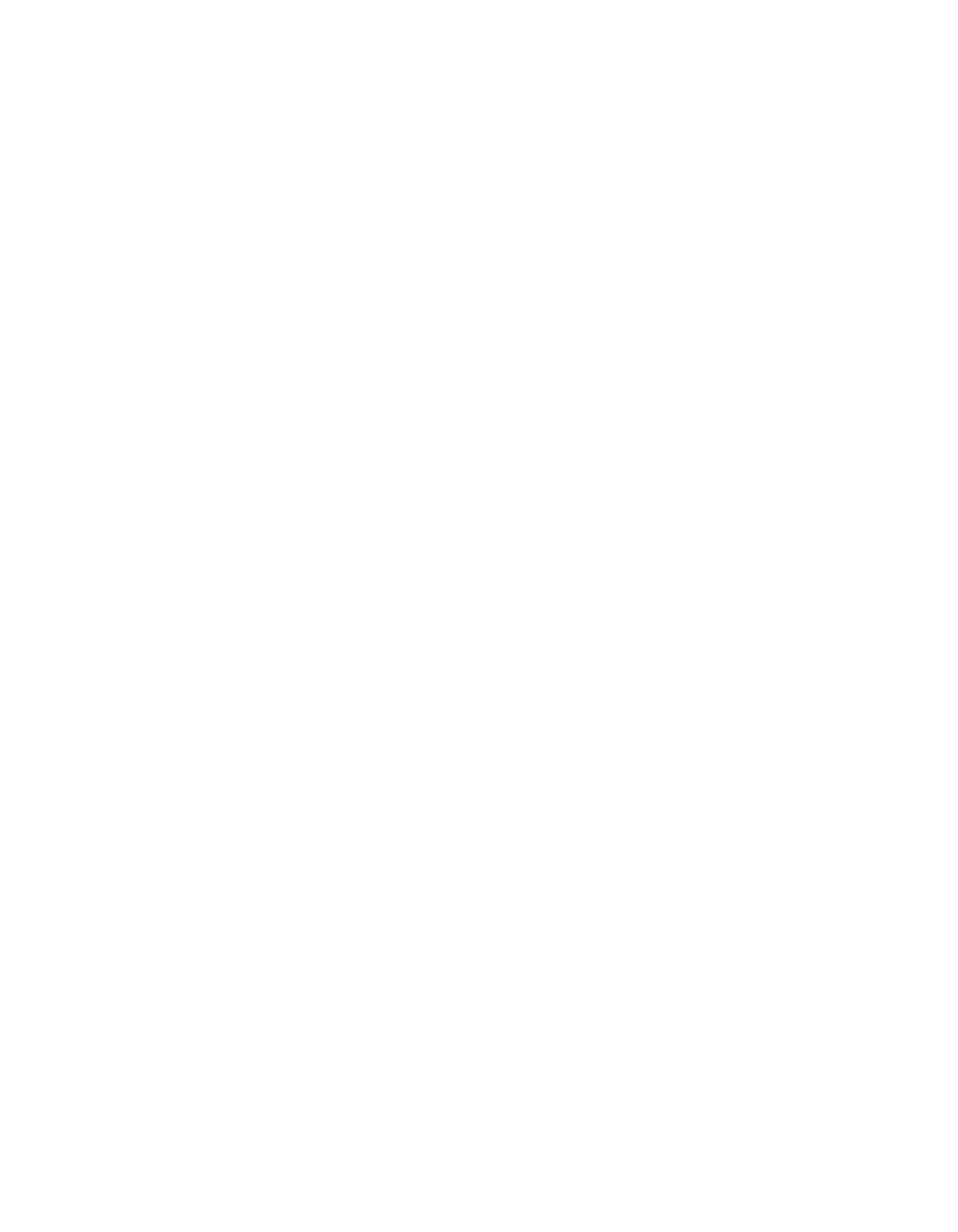




























Things Left Unsaid

Paul Seawright's *Things Left Unsaid* is a study in the geometry of light. Its subject is the flat earth of modern information technology, several modes of which are visible in the images as television and computer screens. There is a stark division between this world of orchestrated illumination and the external realities it claims to represent with no shade in the images but a black barrier between the light and its others.

Things Left Unsaid pictures a vacuum not quite of this earth. The images of a television studio have the orbital gravity of an ageing space station. Presenters are wired up with electronics and point at blank screens like maps of a left behind world, the only memory of which are the curved shapes of the past. One woman has her foot half in the air as she mouths to camera, as if about to drift up. There is no speech here but cues and mimes, the human element contained in the neon green frame of the countdown clock between items. This is exhausting, even for the machines. A cluster of lights lies crumpled on the floor drained of energy, a clatter of wires plug into the sockets of a machine from an earlier age. Handles and levers guard the portal from the outside world to the inner space of the studio.

The engineers of this illusion are invisible. In their place, lights bright as the desert burn out of the black like miniature suns. This is an uncomfortable atmosphere, not designed for long habitation. It is a plastic place whose conduits are the power lines that snake over floors and coil up walls to loop on waiting cameras. These generate the lurid greens and blues that flare out of the darkness to illuminate the sets. There, colors leech onto the human form, corralling the presenter in a floodlit circuit of overwhelming silence. This light is the burnt flare of the past, the trace element of an event whose significance is lost at the point of observation. White-hot screens hover over the news desk in fractal relation to the static form of the presenter, his head raised slightly to watch the dance of the machines above him. Laptop computers are humanity's familiars in this illuminative geometry, astrolabes to read the bright signs that burn through the darkness of the studio atmosphere.

Now the signs are threatening. No longer is the old technology able to regulate news as a defining category of significant information. The dead light of a new world flashes bleakly on smartphone caught atrocities. The condemned suffer in full sight while their torturers hide behind black veils. This is an inversion of the established model, whereby light made war on the dark. Now the dark has its own projection, and its own aesthetic. This is the melancholy underpinning of *Things Left Unsaid*. The orchestration of the old world is visible now in its means of production and less convincing because its tools have lost their aura of innovation. This is the desperation of the presenter's smile, the painted rictus of the made-up mask.

The augur of the future has taken many visual forms historically. In *Things Left Unsaid* the dark is host to the red and orange flare up of the studio wall, the outburst of color a clash of two perspectives. That it assumes the infernal suggests the past's absolute redundancy. There is a gesture towards some kind of reconciliation in the playful image of the high altitude city that surfaces in more than one of the images. The most striking of these is the wood framed landscape that serves as an invitation to identify with the ideal community of shared space where tower blocks share their modesty with gentle mountains, the heights giving way to green space and the freeway.

This is a limited utopia that takes shape only in the frame. It represents an archaic ambition to still that which is in constant motion and is undone by the electrical architecture of its setting. Everywhere there are wires and plugs that loop through *Things Left Unsaid*. Whatever the visual rhetoric, there is no ideal state but motion, which returns us again to light. There is a magical quality to the electric infusion of brightness in these images. The void it generates is a signal of the dark energy that separates the world into the here and there, the enlightened and the barbarous. The curious melancholy of *Things Left Unsaid* is less a longing for the security of the American century and more a sympathy for the empty effort that still tries to summon power from visual ritual. Light moves fast and darkness remains.

— Nicholas Allen

Things Left Unsaid
by Paul Seawright

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